PRESS

Newsweek—Wally McNamee

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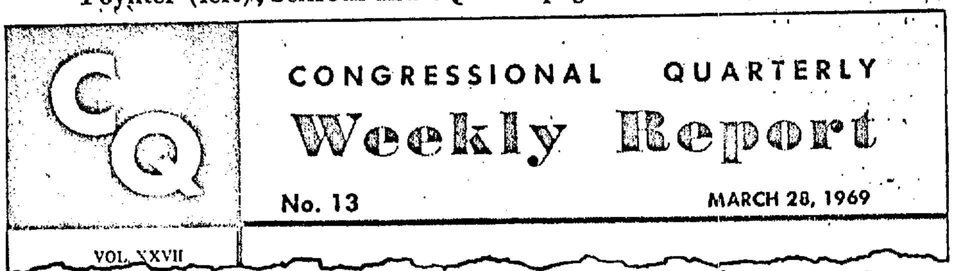
Poynter (left), Schroth and CQ front page: On collision course?



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Battle of Capitol Hill

In its quiet, no-nonsense, comprehensive way, the Congressional Quarterly has become required reading for busy congressmen, legislative aides, journalists, scholars, businessmen and librarians. Now published every Friday, CQ documents most of the bills that have reached the floor of Congress during the week, lists all provisions and amendments and highlights the debates. It reviews committee hearings and methodically lists roll-call votes. Supplementary services range from a weekly calendar of events to a biennial report by Richard Scammon on U.S. voting patterns. "It's the most useful thing a political reporter can stick in his suitcase," says The Washington Post's David Broder. "It's virtually indispensable in either House or Senate," says Dave Newhall, a Senate aide.

Executive editor Thomas Schroth has, over the fourteen years of his association with the Quarterly, become known in Washington as "Mr. CQ." Since his arrival in the Quarterly's Washington office, the publication has increased its revenues from about $150,000 to $1.8 million a year (which stems almost entirely from services that cost from $132 a year for libraries to $50 a week for newspapers with a circulation more than 600,000).

The dispassion of CQ's pages apparently was not reflected in Schroth's relations with CQ's owner, Nelson Poynter (who also owns The St. Petersburg Times). Poynter, 65, fired the 48-year-old Schroth, explaining he wasn't satisfied "with the degree of progress and the quality of our service." Poynter says he's taking complete charge now, plans to increase the size of the staff from 45 to 55 and has already hired a replacement for Schroth: Richard Billings, 38, a former editor at Life magazine and Poynter's Florida daily. "In the future our basic formula will remain the same," says Poynter. "But I think we will become more responsive and move faster."

In firing Schroth, however, Poynter may have created more trouble for his Quarterly than he counted on. The ousted Schroth has announced the formation of a new weekly called the National Journal, to be published by the recently formed Center for Political Research. Lawyers Alexander M. Lankler and Anthony C. Stout and New York stockbroker F. Randall Smith have provided most of the backing—a reported $2 million—to finance the journal and the related services of the center. The annual cost of subscribing may range from $200 to $2,000 depending on who the subscriber is and how many supplementary services he wants. The first issue will be in the mails sometime this summer. Schroth's staff—which is expected to number at least 50 journalists and researchers—has already begun working on a book which will describe the Federal government in action.

Rivals: Schroth says that the Journal will cover the executive branch more comprehensively than the Quarterly. And, he says, "we're going to take a hard look at Federal agencies and try to show how these agencies react to each other and to outside pressure groups." Moreover, the center will hold seminars, plan research projects, and be equipped to conduct research for such clients as TV networks and universities.

But for all these innovative elements, Schroth's National Journal promises to be something of an alter ego to the Quarterly. "About 50 per cent of what we're doing will be similar to what they're doing," he concedes. Certainly some of the staff will be similar. Schroth has already hired ten former Quarterly employees, including Neal R. Peirce, the CQ's political editor. "Nelson Poynter did me a favor by firing me," Schroth says.

The Uses of Capitalism

In its brief, turbulent history, Ramparts magazine has managed to keep its guard up for sensational stories. It publicized the CIA's underwriting of the National Student Association and hustled Che Guevara's diary away from competing American publishers. But despite these efforts, the five-year-old magazine ran up a $2 million debt. A few months ago editorial director Warren Hinckle grabbed a plane to New York in a frantic attempt to raise funds; upon returning, he announced that he was planning to start his own magazine, to be called Barricades. But publisher Frederick Mitchell and editor Robert Scheer, as well as the majority of the staff, didn't give up. With a hefty donation of cash from such contributors as Stewart Mott (son of the largest shareholder of General Motors), the magazine kept going while at the same time declaring "voluntary bankruptcy"—a provision of the Federal tax law that lets debt-ridden corporations stave off creditors temporarily in order to get back on their feet.

Invoking the temporary bankruptcy clause of the U.S. law was just one of many ironies in the magazine's short life. "This is one of those intricate mechanisms which American capitalism has provided for its own renewal," declares an editorial in the May issue, "and we don't feel the least corrupted for having availed ourselves of its privileges." But the magazine will tighten up on its own operations by returning to monthly publication (it had experimented with twice-monthly issues), drastically reducing color spreads, relocating from its $1,400-a-month San Francisco Bay-view office to more modest quarters, and paring down its staff from 35 to 20. The magazine still faces an uphill fight to reverse the trend of losses that ran as high as $30,000 a month. Among the magazine's creditors: Dr. Benjamin Spock ($50), Eldridge Cleaver ($805) and Pacific Telephone and Telegraph ($19,000).

■ Another lively but ad-thin magazine, New York, announced that it would try to solve its financial difficulties ($1.5 million in losses last year) by forming Aeneid Equities—a holding company to own the magazine—which will begin selling public stock in a few months. Though the magazine's circulation has risen at the rate of some 1,000 subscribers a week (bringing the total to about 140,000), it has barely received half the advertising needed to break even. Still, New York was in the mood for celebrating its first anniversary—it bought breakfast at the Four Seasons restaurant for some 500 guests.

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